

Testimony of Alice Nelson Ferguson
Appropriations Committee
20 February 2009

I was diagnosed with full blown AIDS in 1989. I previously worked as a Telecommunications Systems Specialist for Aetna Life & Casualty. My working career ended as a result of many severe complications of AIDS. In 2000, after living in an AIDS hospice for five years, I resumed responsibility for myself and moved back into the community. My life had changed from complete financial independence to a month to month existence coupled with many fears about my future. I had to come to terms with the fact my life as I knew it had changed.

I have depended on AIDS service organizations (ASOs) for the most basic assistance, receiving help with food, utility bills, doctor's bills, medication and rental subsidies over the years. The downward spiral of funding and services has forced me to rely on my adult children for food. I've eliminated every unnecessary expense I can. Dependence upon ASOs has resulted in a place to live and an opportunity to breathe again and look forward to tomorrow, that day of change we are all waiting on. Payee of last resort, mandated before receiving any assistance, was a simple matter when there are no other resorts available.

Life becomes much more difficult when you add a chronic disease to everyday's equation. It takes on a darker hue when there's no job, no money, no food, and no source of light. These circumstances are common in the lives many people living with HIV/AIDS. Consumers are faced with a multitude of dilemmas; we must adhere to a schedule of toxic medications, attend medical appointments and balance it all with awareness that you must keep a roof over your head, pay bills and provide for the most basic needs. Sadly, many people are who are not burdened with HIV/AIDS are suffering a similar predicament. However, I can only be marginally sympathetic because I have been affected by a financial crisis for so very long now.

Making the appropriate funding decisions and not proposing additional spending cuts will ease some of the burden of consumers. We cannot make any more sacrifices than have already been dictated by the reduced funding in recent years. I am asking you to commit to funding HIV/AIDS services primarily because without them, many consumers have no alternative, and the fight to stay alive becomes vain.